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ABSTRACT

This document answers the questions Kentuckians asked Governor Wallace G. Wilkinson (Kentucky) about his proposals for educational reform. Governor Wilkinson claims that the traditional school structure leaves the educational needs of many children unmet because it is not flexible enough to meet their different learning needs. The Governor proposes restructuring the Kentucky school system by giving schools more local control to enable them to try innovative ways of educating students. Although schools will have more freedom, they will also be held more accountable for student outcomes. The Governor's School Improvement Incentive Program lists academic achievement, student attitudes, and student school behavior as categories in which to focus desired student outcomes. The Governor proposes a Council on School Performance Standards to define the standards of performance to be achieved by students on each outcome measure, and to determine the most appropriate way to document and assess student performance. School-based management involves enlisting teachers and administrators into a collective effort to improve their school. The Governor proposes Benchmark Schools, which will be schools that commit to improve by addressing problems in innovative and creative ways. Benchmark Schools will demonstrate the process and provide resources to other schools to begin school-based management. Schools that improve student performance will receive monetary rewards for all teachers and administrators. (KS)

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Q.A.

IMPROVING KENTUCKY SCHOOLS

A CONVERSATION WITH GOVERNOR WALLACE G. WILKINSON

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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

Fellow Kentuckians:

When I campaigned for Governor, I maintained that Kentucky had to undergo fundamental change if we were to meet the pressing economic and educational needs of our people. I proposed a bold, new and innovative approach to improving our schools. I want to take this opportunity to explain my approach to improving our schools and discuss why I think this approach holds promise of genuine improvement in the learning of our children.

Many good things have been done in recent years to strengthen our schools, but we still have not significantly changed how we educate our children. All the major studies on schooling in America have agreed that our historical approach to schooling poses serious problems for a significant number of our children. Many of them will complete their schooling without adequate preparation for the world in which they will work and live. Furthermore, in some of our districts, as many as one out of every three students will leave school without a high school diploma.

I believe nothing short of a major change in our approach to improving education will get the job done. The prestigious report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy had this to say about what needed to be done to improve our schools:

> *Much of the rhetoric of the recent education reform movement has been couched in the language of decline, suggesting that standards have slipped, that the education system has grown lax and needs to return to some earlier performance standard to succeed. Our view is very different. We do not believe the educational system needs repairing; we believe it must be rebuilt to match the drastic change needed in our economy if*

we are to prepare our children for productive lives in the 21st century. (A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century, p. 3*)*

After concluding the most exhaustive study of American schools in recent years, Dr. John Goodlad concluded that "far-reaching restructuring of our schools and indeed our system of education probably is required for us to come even close to the educational ideals we so regularly espouse for this nation and all its people." (*A Place Called School*, p. 92)

The traditional school structure leaves the educational needs of many children unmet because it is not flexible enough to meet their different learning needs. Some education critics have said that as few as 15 to 20 percent are being properly educated. It is common knowledge that children have different interests, skills, aptitudes and temperaments. Likewise, they learn in different ways, express themselves in different ways, and are motivated in different ways. A classroom in which everyone is studying the same thing at the same time is not one that can easily adapt to individual differences in either learning style or ability.

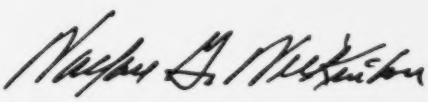
There can't be much diversity in ability, motivation and background among students when they are all expected to learn at the same rate. We have structured our instructional process in such a way that teachers must cover a specific amount of course material on schedule, or the whole class falls behind. Slower students often need more time to grasp certain concepts than is "scheduled," while brighter students "cover the material" quickly and are bored. Little wonder that so many children have difficulty learning in our schools.

In effect, our school failures are children who "don't fit the system." The educational system within which teachers must cultivate and manage the learning process is the source of the problem. Our schools are based on an inflexible, assembly line instructional process that was conceptualized a hundred years ago. Many teachers have proven they can work effectively with children who have different learning styles, aptitudes or interests; they simply cannot do it within the constraints of an outmoded curriculum and method of instruction.

I believe it is time to change "the system" because Kentucky cannot afford to have one more child enter adulthood without an appropriate and sufficient education. We must create schools that can adapt to the learning needs of all children — children who learn differently, come from different cultures and life styles, or experience life circumstances which make learning difficult. However, as the experts have pointed out, it is unlikely that we will experience any dramatic improvement in student learning until we restructure our approach to educating children.

This booklet answers the questions Kentuckians have asked me over the past several months about my education proposals. They are good questions about how and why we want to restructure our schools. I hope you will read the booklet thoroughly and share it with other Kentuckians. Together we can improve our schools for all our children.

Sincerely,



Wallace G. Wilkinson
Governor

Q	A
When you say we need to "restructure our schools," what specifically do you think needs to be changed?	By restructuring our schools, I mean creating an organizational environment within which teachers are able to make and implement professional judgments about the best way to meet the instructional needs of individual children. As I just said, the school system we now have doesn't give teachers and administrators enough flexibility in determining the best way to achieve the objectives of the school curriculum.
Q	**A**
Do you have some model in mind that you want schools to adopt?	I am not proposing any particular kind of change in schools. Everything I have learned about schools indicates that there is no single "right" way to organize a school. Every school is somewhat different from every other school in terms of the resources available and the characteristics of the students and community. Individual schools, with support from their districts, are in the best position to make decisions on the most appropriate use of school resources to meet the unique learning needs of their students. I simply want to create a school environment in which the professional staff of a school is encouraged to use whatever methods of instruction they deem appropriate in their particular school, and then hold them accountable for the outcome.

6

Q

How would you go about "restructuring" Kentucky's schools?

A

First, I believe we should establish standards for student achievement and behavior that go beyond minimums and basic skills. I believe we should define these standards in terms of what we really want from our schools, not the least we will accept from them. In my mind, the whole concept of school accountability should be built on this basic premise.

Second, it is imperative that we develop a consensus among the public, teachers and school administrators on what constitutes acceptable evidence that these standards are being met by *all* children to the best of their ability.

Third, primary responsibility for determining the best way to structure and manage the instructional process should be vested in the school professionals at the building level. This means, in a practical sense, moving the primary responsibility for improving student learning from the *statehouse to the schoolhouse.*

Finally, we should measure student performance and appropriately reward those who are successful in improving it.

Q

Why do you believe it is so important to establish these outcome standards?

A

Our schools should be able to document that children are learning what they are expected to know. Unfortunately, we have made relatively little progress in this area as evidenced by the recent abandonment of the Kentucky Essential Skills Test. However, without some agreement between the public

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and the school professionals on this point, I believe it's very unlikely that our schools are going to regain the public's confidence and receive the kind of public support they need.

The intent of establishing what I'm calling student performance standards is to *focus the attention of teachers and administrators more on outcomes than on compliance with rules and regulations.* This requires a clearer understanding than currently exists of what outcomes are desired. Establishing standards for educational attainment in Kentucky schools is perhaps the most challenging, but also the most critical task we face in trying to improve our schools. Kentuckians need to clearly define the level of performance we want our children to attain in school.

Historically, schools have not been assessed in terms of student learning. Criteria were developed which, in effect, described what a "good school" looked like. A good school would have certain amenities, follow certain procedures, employ only credentialed teachers, have a certain number and kind of books in the library, and so forth. Presumably, if a school possessed these characteristics, children would be able to successfully learn. *Consequently, for years we determined how good our schools were in terms of how closely they matched these "input and process" standards for a "good" school. Relatively little attention was given to student outcomes. So we need to change how we evaluate schools when we look for improvement in them.*

In any case, if we are going to ask teachers and administrators to improve student performance, we need to be specific about what that means. In this context, it doesn't mean just being in compliance with rules and regulations. *It means making sure students learn what we expect them to know.* Therefore, we had better be clear about what it is we expect them to know.

Q

What kind of "outcomes" do you have in mind?

A

At the least, I think they would include such things as academic achievement in subject areas beyond just basic skills; student attitudes toward self, school and learning; and various school behaviors such as attendance, advancement to the next grade on schedule, a minimum number of days lost due to suspension from classes, and completion of schooling through the 12th grade. In the School Improvement Incentive Program bill I submitted to the 1988 session of the General Assembly, I proposed that the following areas be considered as desired outcomes from schooling:

- ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
  - General Academic Achievement
    - Reading, Mathematics, Language Arts (spelling, writing and usage of English), Science & Social Studies in all grades; humanities (art, music, literature) for grades 6 through 12; foreign language proficiency for students who take them at any grade level; and vocational competencies for students in vocational programs
  - Higher Order Thinking Skills
    - Ability to use information correctly
    - Problem-solving
    - Inferential reasoning

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- STUDENT ATTITUDES
  - About self
  - About school
  - About learning
- STUDENT SCHOOL BEHAVIOR
  - Present in class on time
  - Attends school every day
  - Completes the 12th grade
  - No suspension from class or school
  - Promotion to next grade level on schedule

Obviously, many of these areas are not part of the state's school assessment process as it now stands.

Q

You mentioned earlier something about having higher standards as well as minimums for student performance. What did you mean by that?

A

As I said before, we have concentrated on setting minimum standards because we wanted to be able to ensure that Kentucky's schools provided at least a minimum education. The concern was to identify any school that was so bad the state needed to intervene in its affairs because children were being deprived of even a minimum education.

Certainly, we need to continue to have and enforce such standards. However, they really are not useful in telling us how effective a school is. Minimum standards are not the proper foundation on which to build a quality education system. In addition to minimum standards, we need standards that represent the most desirable or attainable level of student achievement possible on each outcome measure. My primary concern is with improving all schools, not just those that are on the bottom.

Q

Are you saying that we are concentrating too much on the poorer performing schools?

A

No. Certainly, I'm not suggesting that we stop our effort to intervene in those schools that are clearly on the bottom. As you know, we have the "academic bankruptcy" law already in place. This law gives the state authority to intervene in those schools that are doing so poorly. I support that law, and I expect the State Board of Education and Superintendent of Public Instruction will aggressively carry out its intent. The point I want to make is that concentrating so much on minimum standards doesn't give us a proper indication of what we really want from our schools.

Q

You said you would begin restructuring schools by establishing a process for developing standards for student performance that represent our highest expectations. How would this process work?

A

What is measured and rewarded will ultimately define what our schools will emphasize, so extreme care needs to be taken in the development of this part of the program. The "yardstick" or "gauge" against which schools are to be measured must be credible to parents, the general public and to educators. Therefore, I am proposing that these matters be addressed by a permanent body I am calling a Council on School Performance Standards.

The Council would establish the standards of performance to be achieved by students on each outcome measure. The Council also would determine the most appropriate way to document student performance on a school by school basis. Finally, the Council

would develop the policies and procedures for the school assessment process.

Revisions will be needed from time to time as Kentucky's expectations of student performance change over time, the state of the art in testing and measurement improves, and operational experience with the assessment process indicates that a modification of the policies and procedures is needed. The Council should periodically review, and revise as appropriate, the standards of student performance, the methods of measuring student performance, and the policies and procedures for the assessment of student performance.

Q

Who would make up the membership of this Council on School Performance Standards, and how would they be selected?

A

Although the structure of the Council is not set in concrete, I believe it should have a dedicated, knowledgeable membership that is not too large in number. I have proposed that the membership of the Council consist of the following ex-officio members: the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Chairperson of the State Board of Education, and the Secretary of the Education and Humanities Cabinet. In addition to these three members, I have proposed the appointment of three school professionals (teachers and/or administrators) and three additional members from the State Board of Education. Each of these people would be appointed by the Governor for a term of four years. The Governor also would name the Chairperson of the Council.

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Q	A
What relationship would the Council have to the State Board of Education and the Kentucky Department of Education?	The standards of student performance and all policies and procedures established by the Council would have to be ratified by the State Board of Education to become effective. The Department of Education would administer these policies and procedures once they are ratified by the State Board of Education. The Department also has an important and vital function to play in gathering and analyzing data, and generally assisting in the implementation of the assessment process.
Q	**A**
Does this assessment process replace the testing program now mandated by the General Assembly?	No, it doesn't. However, in addition to that test, I am proposing that all schools be required to document the performance of all enrolled students, using whatever methods of measurement the Council determines are to be used for the assessment process. It is possible, of course, that some or all of the test now mandated by the General Assembly might be used as part of the assessment developed by the Council.
Q	**A**
Do you envision using just one test to assess student performance?	Professional educators believe Kentucky needs to use more than just one measure of student performance to get a fair and accurate assessment of what students really have learned. Therefore, a number of tests or other methods of documentation of student learning probably will be needed to cover all the areas of student achievement

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included in the assessment of student performance. However, this matter would be addressed by the Council on School Performance Standards.

Q

It seems as though you are proposing that we measure a lot of things we have never measured before. How do you see this affecting your intent to start restructuring Kentucky schools in the near future?

A

I don't think it's necessary for every area to be covered before we begin assessing student performance. I believe Kentucky should start the assessment process with whatever can be agreed upon in the near term. We can add other measures or cover additional areas as we come to agreement upon the appropriate methods for measuring them. The most important thing is to get the Council in place and begin the assessment process as soon as possible.

Q

The third thing you said needed to be done to restructure Kentucky's schools was to vest primary responsibility for improving student performance in the school professionals at the building level. Why is this important?

A

Experience has taught us that lasting change in large organizations like schools occurs only when the people in these organizations are directly involved in and become committed to those changes. If they have a personal stake in the solution, they are much more likely to work diligently toward its implementation. Therefore, the professionals at the school site should be charged with the task of determining how best to structure a school so that all children are able to learn.

Q	A
Is this what you have in mind when you talk about school-based management?	Let's be clear about this. I am not proposing another program for schools called "school-based management" that every school now will have to implement. I talk about school-based management as an approach to improving schools because it is my conviction that the kind of changes we need to make in the way we educate our children will require the collective effort of everyone in the school. Significant changes in the instructional process affect many people in the school, so their mutual participation is essential. It's not something an individual teacher can bring about solely through his or her individual effort. Neither is it something that can be imposed from a central authority. All the research on what makes schools effective has shown that schools which practice some form of collegial decisionmaking at the site level have a school climate that is much more conducive to innovation and change than schools which are managed in a "top-down" manner. The way many of our schools are now organized, most teachers spend little time working together on how to improve student performance. Historically, we have managed our schools in ways that make meaningful collaborative decisionmaking very difficult. Furthermore, we have not required that they either teach or manage for results. School management has focused too much on compliance with rules and regulations. I firmly believe this has to change if

we are to see significant improvement in student learning.

Incidently, I know that we have school administrators and teachers in Kentucky who already are managing and teaching for results on a school site basis, so the idea is not new to Kentucky. The issue is that it needs to be the rule rather than the exception.

Q

Some people seem to think you want to deregulate schools and turn their management over to teachers. Is this what you have in mind?

A

As I mentioned before, we need to create a different working environment for our schools. Among other things, we should eliminate any element that discourages teachers and administrators from changing the instructional process. As I have said many times, we *must* make it possible for teachers and administrators to adapt the instructional process to the unique learning needs of their children. To whatever extent the "system" inhibits that process, the system must be changed, and the state should be a partner, not an impediment, in helping to bring about that change.

Some people have interpreted this to mean that I want to deregulate schools. I want to make my position on this clear. Rules and regulations are not inherently bad. Nothing I am proposing changes the governance responsibility for our schools at either the state or local level. I am only responding to a concern expressed to me by many school administrators and teachers, who contend that they could be more effective if they weren't so constrained by rigid rules and

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regulations. Whether this is the case or not, I really don't know for certain. However, I believe no rule or policy at the state level should prevent schools from doing something they know and can demonstrate will improve student performance. We need to encourage teachers and administrators to experiment with alternative ways to get the job done without fear that their school's accreditation might be put in jeopardy or that they will be cited for being out of compliance with some rule or regulation.

Q **A**

If regulations are an obstacle, how do you see this obstacle being removed?

This can be accomplished by the State Board of Education which can grant temporary waivers, on a site by site basis, from any existing regulation that doesn't pose a direct threat to the health or safety of a child, based upon a locally approved plan of action prepared by the staff of the local school. I certainly am not proposing that we arbitrarily abolish any particular regulation until it can be shown by experience or logic that such a regulation is, in fact, a problem.

Q **A**

What do you think the proper role of the state is in helping schools improve?

That's a very important point, because my views on this are perhaps different from those of other state policymakers. In our zeal to see improvement in education, we have sometimes gone too far in telling schools how to get their job done. In some instances, state actions have been based solely on an attitude of distrust of school personnel. The belief seems to be that it is our

responsibility at the state level to force people to do their job correctly. Well, I don't believe that approach has worked, and for good reason.

As I said earlier, I realize the state has a responsibility to intervene in those schools where performance is so poor they constitute a danger to the children they serve. But when it comes to telling schools what instructional materials to use, how many minutes to spend on a subject, and so forth, we have gone too far. I do not believe we should continue to pursue a policy of school improvement that is based on the notion that people in Frankfort are in a better position to determine the best way to deliver instruction than are the professionals at the school site.

Q

Aren't you putting a lot of faith in people the public is blaming for the problems in our schools? Surely there are some teachers who are in a rut and won't want to change. How will this affect your effort to restructure our schools?

A

Probably some teachers and administrators have been in the system so long they have adapted to it and have given up trying to do anything different. However, if there is to be any change in the instructional process in the near future, it will be brought about by the teachers and administrators we have now — not the ones we will train differently in the future. Therefore, it is imperative that we motivate and empower the people currently in our schools to bring about the changes that need to be made now. Training teachers in better ways to teach will mean nothing unless we also change what teachers and students are able to do when they are together in the classroom.

We must create an environment in our schools in which our educational professionals can do what is necessary to meet the learning needs of every child. At a minimum, this is an environment that encourages innovation and rewards improvement. *An environment that rewards people for getting the job done rather than for just complying with rules and regulations.* We must trust those we have placed in charge of our schools to find the best way possible for educating all our children, but hold them accountable for achieving that goal.

Q

In effect, you believe the personnel in our schools are basically capable of educating all children if we simply change the structure of the instructional process that determines what they are able to do in the classroom. Is that a correct summary of your view on how to improve Kentucky's schools?

A

As I have said many times, I believe most teachers know how to teach children with different learning needs and abilities, but the educational process found in many of our schools inhibits their ability to effectively use this knowledge. Over the years we have increasingly specified how teachers are to conduct their classes, the materials to use, the amount of time to be devoted to specific subjects, and so forth, leaving little room for flexibility or professional judgment. In effect, we have turned many of them into little more than instructional robots.

Given the opportunity, teachers and administrators can work together effectively to change the instructional process, but they must be given the incentive and freedom to make these changes. A number of our districts are already moving in this direction with extraordinary results. I want to create that kind of environment for administrators

and teachers in every one of Kentucky's schools.

Q

Does your program have any provision for training teachers and administrators in how to go about "school restructuring" and "school-based management"?

A

As I just said, some schools in Kentucky already are changing their instructional process to better meet the learning needs of all their children, and a growing number are finding that school-based management is an effective method of bringing about these changes. However, other schools will find this a serious challenge. I have proposed dealing with the problem of training in two ways: creating 21 Benchmark Schools that can demonstrate the process, and providing resources to schools that will enable their staff to visit other schools already practicing school-based management, or to invite experts and others to their schools for advice.

Q

You mentioned the creation of 21 Benchmark Schools. What specifically are these schools?

A

The Benchmark Schools would be created to give other schools the opportunity to better understand the process of change, how to conduct collegial decisionmaking, how to set instructional goals and to plan for their achievement, and how to increase the ability of school staffs to help their students reach the desired levels of achievement envisioned in the Program. These schools would be granted certain exemptions from regulations to permit maximum flexibility in meeting the optimal performance standards set by the Council on School Performance Standards.

However, the Benchmark Schools would remain under the jurisdiction and control of

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their local Superintendent and Board of Education. The Benchmark Schools are to be prototypes that other schools in the Commonwealth can emulate. They are to incorporate and utilize the very latest practices in educational theory, technology and classroom staffing and organization.

In addition to their role as prototypes, the Benchmark School staffs also would be available for consultation with the professional staffs of other schools in the Commonwealth to share their experiences with innovation and change in the instructional processes the Benchmark Schools have implemented.

Q	A
What kind of schools will be designated Benchmark Schools?	The Benchmark Schools are not expected to be "merit" or "exemplary" schools at the time of their selection. Rather, the intent is to find schools which have significant performance problems but are committed to addressing these problems in innovative and creative ways. Therefore, schools that wish to become Benchmark Schools will be expected to demonstrate in tangible ways their dedication and commitment to change. It is equally important that a Benchmark School have the full support of the parents of the children in the school, the teachers, the principals and other staff at the school site, the central school administrative staff, the local superintendent and the local school board. I have proposed that initially three schools — an elementary, a middle and a secondary school — be selected from each Congres-

sional District in order to ensure appropriate geographic distribution of the Benchmark Schools. Only one school would be selected from the same school district so that more school districts can participate in the Benchmark School program. The only exception to this would be the Jefferson County Public School District, since it falls within a single Congressional District. Other schools can be designated as Benchmark Schools in the future. The steps taken to become Benchmark Schools are the steps every school eventually will take if it is to significantly improve.

Q	A
How will the Benchmark Schools be selected?	The process should originate within a local school. The personnel in that school must express a desire for the designation and a commitment to live up to the expectations of the Benchmark School program. Therefore, the first step would be for a local school to nominate itself to its local Board of Education as a candidate for the Benchmark designation. If the local Superintendent and Board of Education support the local school's desire to become a candidate, then that local school would prepare an application providing documentation that it is committed and prepared to function as a state-of-the-art school. As I see the process working, the local school application would have to be approved by the local Superintendent and Board of Education, and then be submitted to the State Board of Education. The Governor

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and the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Chairperson of the State Board of Education would review all applications and make recommendations to the State Board of Education for the selection of the 21 Benchmark Schools. The designation as a Benchmark School would continue for a period of not less than six years unless such a school requested to withdraw from the program.

Q

How will the Benchmark Schools be related to each other if they remain under the control of their local superintendent and board of education?

A

I am proposing that the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Governor's Office jointly develop a state-level structure to coordinate the activities of the Benchmark Schools. Among these activities could be such things as the coordination of technical assistance, exchange of information among Benchmark Schools, and consultation with other Kentucky schools.

Each Benchmark School will be free to develop and implement its own strategies for change under the guidance of the local superintendent and board of education. The state's role is to be a resource and to facilitate access to external resources, to promote communication among the Benchmark Schools and the exchange of information about their experiences to other schools in Kentucky.

Q	A
Will the Benchmark Schools receive a large amount of money?	It is my hope that over the years special funds will be appropriated for use by the Benchmark Schools to acquire state-of-the-art instructional resources for use in their buildings. However, the idea is not to put lots of money into a few schools at the expense of others. Money granted to these schools would be for demonstration purposes only with the expectation that other schools would be able to acquire similar resources if the demonstration proved effective. I am proposing that these schools receive funds for one staff person for each school who can coordinate the school's activities with those of the other Benchmark Schools, and facilitate the exchange of information among the Benchmark Schools and with other schools in their region of the state.

Q	A
What else do you propose to do other than create the 21 Benchmark Schools?	Informational programs will be provided for teachers and administrators on how to determine what changes need to be made in the school's instructional process, and how to bring them about in an orderly fashion. The intent is to help them go through the change process without being prescriptive about what specific changes should be made or how to bring them about.

Q

So we create an environment for change at the state and local level. What else must happen if we are to restructure our schools?

A

We need to introduce incentives into our schools that encourage and reward those who achieve significant improvement in student performance. Currently, teachers and administrators are compensated without regard to how well or how poorly their students perform. This needs to be changed. We must make clear what we want as an outcome and then reward it when it is achieved. Simply put, *the desired outcome must be defined, encouraged and rewarded.*

I want to create a financial reward system that provides cash bonuses to all personnel in a school based on demonstrated improvement in the performance of students in the school across a whole array of criteria. While all staff within the school would receive the award earned by the school, it must be earned through their collective efforts.

Q

I think I understand what you are trying to do, but let me raise the issue of poor performing teachers. Won't this program reward them right along with the better teachers?

A

Obviously, it will. The incentive program will equally reward all teachers and administrators in a school that improves student performance regardless of the individual performance of any staff member of that school. The program is not intended to be a method of evaluating and rewarding individual teachers. The intent is to encourage people to work together as a school by rewarding their collective rather than individual efforts.

However, while we are on this subject, let me make a point I believe is important. My program is not designed to be a method of identifying and eliminating incompetent teachers or administrators. Most teachers and administrators know who is carrying the load and who isn't. They don't need an incentive system to tell them who is and who isn't a good teacher or administrator. In most instances, personnel evaluations should be designed to improve the performance of people, not to discriminate among them. In a few instances, they are needed to justify the dismissal of a truly incompetent employee.

Q

Are programs like a career ladder, merit pay, or bonuses linked to individual teacher performance not important?

A

Such programs might have a place in our schools, but they do not promote the kind of overall structural changes that are needed if we are to see a significant improvement in student performance. Any school that desires to have any of these programs may do so. They are neither a substitute for, nor are they inconsistent with, my School Improvement Incentive Program. Programs that recognize the special achievements of individual teachers and administrators can continue or might be created in the future if such programs are thought to be useful by the people involved.

I believe it is generally agreed that people like to be recognized for their individual efforts. However, schooling is a team effort and not an individual enterprise. As in team sports, we may have some superstars, but it

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generally takes a good effort from all team members for the team to win. If a teacher isn't getting the job done, the colleagues of that teacher should show the same concern about their poor performance as any sports team would show toward a weak team member. We need to learn how to make the most of everyone's ability, playing to their individual strengths and taking into account their particular weaknesses.

My School Improvement Incentive Program is designed to encourage the better performing teachers to help the poorer teachers become more effective. It promotes the improvement of poor teachers by encouraging teachers to care about each other's performance rather than by imposing some external evaluation system on them which all too often ends up pitting one teacher against another. That's why it is important to reward everyone for their collective effort rather than reward individuals for their individual effort.

Q

Some teachers contend that we should increase all teacher salaries before we start spending money on bonuses based on school performance. How do you respond to that?

A

The bonuses earned through the School Improvement Incentive Program are not intended to be a substitute for, or an alternative to, a general increase in teacher salaries. The bonus is above and beyond whatever increase in salaries is funded by state or local school authorities. Most teachers I talk to welcome financial recognition for a job well done.

Q

One more question on the idea of giving teachers and administrators a cash bonus for student performance. Shouldn't they be willing to do what you want without the bonus?

A

No doubt some school administrators and teachers already are doing exactly what the incentive program is intended to encourage. Unfortunately, we don't financially reward their accomplishments. It's not my thought that teachers and administrators need to be "bribed" to improve their schools, but rather that Kentucky should financially reward those who demonstrate such improvement. Financial rewards for the attainment of established goals is a widely accepted management practice. Progress in improving our schools deserves financial recognition.

Q

The School Improvement Incentive Program will provide bonuses for significant improvement in student performance on measures established by the Council on School Performance Standards and ratified by the State Board of Education. How do you plan to measure improvement in schools?

A

All students are expected to attain levels of achievement which represent the highest aspirations Kentucky holds for its students in each area of student assessment. These standards are to represent upper level expectations rather than minimum standards. By definition, then, a school is performing at the highest level of excellence when *all* students are achieving at or above the desired standard for students with their relative ability. *Improvement in school performance is defined as an increase in the percentage of students whose educational attainment meets or exceeds the standards established for these areas of student performance.*

The School Improvement Incentive Program is designed to reward significant improvement, but recognizes that achieving ex-

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cellence in the performance of all students is a difficult goal to achieve. I am proposing that the Council on School Performance Standards, based upon research data, determine how much improvement a school could be reasonably expected to make in a single year in improving the percentage of students reaching their expected level of performance in each area of educational attainment. The amount of improvement rewarded should be greater than what might occur purely by chance, while keeping the amount of improvement required to earn the bonus within the reasonable reach of every school. It is as important to reward significant progress as it is to reward reaching the ultimate goal of desired performance.

Q

Some schools have a much larger percentage of children who are difficult to educate than others. Doesn't this mean that some schools will be in a better position to improve student performance than others?

A

Clearly there is a difference among schools in terms of the percentages of students with problems or disadvantages that affect their learning. However, there are no absolute performance standards that all students must meet regardless of relative ability. Each school must only show improvement over previous years in the percentage of students who meet or exceed their standard level of performance.

Obviously, differences in student ability will have to be taken into account when the Council on School Performance Standards sets the level of expected performance on each of the various criteria. Schools will be rewarded for the progress they make toward having all students performing at or above

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the level expected for persons of similar ability.

Q

But isn't it true that some schools simply do not have enough resources to do some of the things the better funded schools are able to do?

A

The inequitable distribution of resources from one school to another is certainly a critical issue for Kentucky. Many things can be done to improve schools through changes in behavior and structure, but it is correct to point out that more resources, *properly used*, could help the less well funded schools develop and implement more effective instructional programs. I intend to address the issue of financial resources as part of the larger question of how to properly fund our schools.

However, we cannot wait for more resources before we try to improve. The current per capita income of Kentuckians is less than that of most states, so whatever increase in resources might be forthcoming may never be what some communities and other states may be able to provide. The challenge facing Kentucky is to spend as effectively as it can whatever resources it has.

One final thought on this point. When one changes the nature of schools, almost always there is an accompanying change in how resources are used. We use our resources in certain ways now because the system requires us to use them in those ways. If we rethink what we want teachers and children to do in the classroom, and what kind of learning environment we will need in order to meet their varied learning needs, we most likely will commit our

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resources in much different ways. *Therefore, it is important that we engage ourselves seriously in the business of restructuring schools, and at the same time look for resources that can be applied to new rather than old solutions to the problems our schools face in trying to educate all of our children.*

Q

There is a lot of concern these days about "at risk" children. How does your program deal with this issue?

A

The emphasis of the program is on educating *all* children. The challenge of my approach to school improvement is that it requires schools to find ways to educate all children regardless of their unique problems or learning needs. This means all children — whether they be gifted and talented, handicapped, or "at risk." In fact, the incentive bonus is based on a school's success in dealing with hard-to-reach children, not on being effective with those who seem to make it in the system as it is. *While this is not a program that says how this should be done, it is a program that rewards people who are successful in finding a way to get it done.*

While I'm on the subject of "at risk" children, I want to point out that many of these children are "at risk" because the instructional process found in most of our schools requires all children to learn at the same rate whether or not they are equally prepared to do so at all times. I do not believe we can successfully educate all children until we are willing and able to develop an instructional process that can adapt to the unique learning needs of all

children. Schools that are successful with "at risk" children are not conducting business as usual. They have abandoned the old approaches and are using techniques which allow teachers to deal effectively with children of unequal preparation and ability. The debate about "at risk" children simply makes the case for restructuring Kentucky schools more convincing.

Q	A
Will there be some starting point from which improvement will be measured?	Yes, there will be. To determine the amount of improvement a school is making, a baseline value for the school must first be established for each performance measure. In the first year of the School Improvement Incentive Program, student performance on each of the assessment measures will be determined to establish a baseline against which to measure future improvement. Every year thereafter, each student's performance is measured again. A school is considered to have improved when the percentage of students scoring at or above the desired standards is greater this year than in any previous year, beginning with the baseline year.

Q	A
What if children move from one school to another? How will this affect the bonus of a school?	I recognize that problems like this will need to be addressed. The Council on School Performance Standards is charged with responsibility for working out such details. It is the Council's responsibility to ensure that the program is fair for every school.

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Q	A
What if a school already has all of its students performing at the expected level on some of the criteria? Will they no longer be eligible for a bonus?	The objective of the School Improvement Incentive Program is to reward quality in education. Since getting *every* child up to the expected level of attainment on *every* criteria will be difficult to do, the program is designed to reward meaningful progress toward that goal. However, if a school is successful in actually reaching this goal, I believe it should continue to be rewarded as long as it can sustain that level of excellence.

Q	A
Who will be eligible for the bonus?	The School Improvement Incentive Program, as I have proposed it, provides that all personnel in a school receive incentive (bonus) dollars, in addition to their regular salary, based on the amount of progress their school makes in increasing the percentage of children who score at or above the desired standards for student performance in the areas measured in the School Improvement Incentive Program. I believe everyone in a school is important to its success, so I have proposed that an additional bonus equal to one-fourth of the amount earned by the certified staff be awarded to classified staff in the school who are employed on a full-time equivalent basis.

Q	A
I realize that many details of the program are being left to the Council on School Performance Standards, but can you clarify whether superintendents and central office or shared staff will be able to earn the incentive bonus?	The central office staff is responsible for all schools in the system and not one single school or group of schools. Therefore, the School Improvement Incentive Program will be designed to recognize and reward the collective efforts of superintendents and central office staff that actively support the performance growth of each individual school in the system. The central office staff incentive bonus will be computed on each measure using all of the students in the school district in the computation. The incentive bonus will be earned on the improvement in the performance of all students in the district.
Q	**A**
How much money can the staff of a local school earn under this program?	I envision the individual cash bonuses will range from $2,000 to $6,000 for certified staff, and an amount equal to 25% of what is earned by the certified staff will be awarded to classified staff. The actual amount an individual can earn in a given year will depend on how much money is appropriated for the salary bonus and how much improvement their school made that year. The details of this are to be worked out by the Council on School Performance Standards, but it is my intent that the entire appropriated amount of money be awarded each year.

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Q

How will this bonus affect teacher salaries and their retirement?

A

The bonus payment is for annual improvement in school performance and must be earned again each year. The state will not pay retirement match nor will the amount paid apply toward retirement income. The bonus will not affect the salary schedule or other compensation programs in effect at the state or local level.

Q

Perhaps this is a negative question, but aren't you concerned that some people might try to cheat or rig the student scores in order to get the money?

A

Indeed, the question is negative, but I certainly am prepared to address the concern. First of all, anyone who would attempt to do this should be dismissed from the education profession. But to reduce the temptation, I have proposed that the intentional submission of false, incomplete or inaccurate data on the basis of which a bonus is paid be a criminal offense.

Q

Several final questions. Do you have a timetable for implementing the School Improvement Incentive Program?

A

Creation of the Council for School Performance Standards is the most critical thing in the near term. We must soon begin the development of the standards against which student performance will be measured. I am hoping this can begin by the Fall of 1988, so we would be in a position to establish an initial measurement baseline on many of the standards before the 1988-89 school year ends. Schools could then begin working toward the first incentive bonus during the 1989-90 school year. The measurement for the first bonus would occur late in that

school year, with the bonus payments coming sometime in the early Fall of 1990. The Benchmark Schools could be designated sometime during the 1988-89 school year, with funding for them beginning with the second fiscal year of the Biennium.

Q	A
How much will this program cost?	Initial annual program costs are projected at $5 million. This includes staff support and related expenses for the Council for School Performance Standards, supplemental student testing costs, and informational assistance and other resource support for school improvement activities and the Benchmark Schools. As for the amount of money needed for the bonus, I want the amount to be large enough to be worth working for. If every employee qualified for the minimum bonus, the total cost could reach $70 million a year.

Q	A
In conclusion, how does your plan for improving schools affect the reforms enacted in the 1985 special session?	What I am proposing does not eliminate, nor is it a substitute for, any program already in place. However, I sincerely believe the approach to improving schools that I am proposing will enable schools to more effectively build on the reforms enacted in 1985. *Taken together, I believe we can move Kentucky closer to the goal of a school system that can effectively educate all of our children to the best of their ability.*

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